

Russian Emigres in Paris Quietly Carving a Niche in

Publishing

By HENRY RAYMONT

Special to The New York Times

PARIS—In dingy offices over an ancient book store near the Sorbonne, a group of Russian émigrés is quietly compiling and reprinting books that have carved a niche in publishing history.

For almost half a century their little-known publishing venture, which says it has been operating with "a modest subsidy" from the Young Men's Christian Association, has been turning out inexpensive paperbacks in Russian. Their list consisted entirely of theological works and Russian classics.

Some months ago the publish-

ing house, known as Y.M.C.A. Press, was thrust into the literary limelight by publishing the first full Russian-language edition of "The Cancer Ward," the controversial novel by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, considered by many to be the Soviet Union's greatest living writer.

Contest for Rights

"The Cancer Ward," based on the author's struggle with cancer while he was a political prisoner during the Stalin regime, has been banned in the Soviet Union, but a number of typewritten manuscripts have reached the West, creating a

bitter competition for publication rights.

Ivan Morozov, a stocky, bald man in his 60's who has been publisher of Y.M.C.A.-Press for nine years, gave no indication of how he had obtained the manuscript. His voice dropping almost to a whisper, he said in heavily accented French: "We received it from very reliable sources, it was absolutely authentic, that's all I can say."

Although Mr. Morozov has been trying to sell world rights to "The Cancer Ward," many Western publishers have turned him down on the ground that he supplied no evidence of having any authorization from the author.

One of the first publishers to become aware of the works of Solzhenitsyn to emerge under a Y.M.C.A.-Press imprint was Otto F. Walter, editor in chief of Luchterhand Verlag, a West German publishing house.

"Some months ago Morozov contacted me with the manuscript of 'The Cancer Ward,'" Mr. Walter recalled recently. "We compared it to another manuscript that had reached us from Bodley Head, the British publisher and they were almost identical, except for some corrections Solzhenitsyn had made in our version. We wanted proof that Y.M.C.A.-Press had the author's approval but they failed to meet this condition."

Interviewed in his sparsely furnished office, a faded Russian icon wedged in a corner its only decoration, Mr. Morozov was noncommittal about his negotiations to sell translation rights to other publishers.

"All we know is that Aleksandr Tvardovsky, the editor of Novy Mir [a liberal Soviet literary journal], wanted to publish 'The Cancer Ward' but was not allowed to by the Soviet cultural officials," he declared.

"We were willing to make the manuscript available to oth-

er publishers since it is not protected by copyright."

Mr. Morozov, a native of Estonia who fled after the Soviet occupation in 1939 and came to Paris as a theology teacher, spoke proudly about the Y.M.C.A.-Press's role as a publisher of contemporary works:

"We run a completely informal and highly personal firm by commercial standards. We have six editors, all of whom are Russian émigrés coming along in years. But we became the first in the West to publish Mikhail Bulgakov's great novel, 'Master and Margarita,' and now we are proud to appear with Solzhenitsyn."

Most of the press's business is still based on religious books, which are sold through mail orders to American universities and in the musty little book store that operates below Mr. Morozov's office under the name "Les Editeurs Reunis."

"For years," he said, "most of our titles were by Russian religious thinkers such as Bunin, Zittsev, Shmelev and Berdyaev, which cannot be obtained in the Soviet Union, while anti-religious literature is published in millions of copies."